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ABSTRACT

For eight years, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) has been engaged in surveying the attitudes of teens and those who most influence them--parents, teachers and school principals. While other surveys seek to measure the extent of substance abuse in the population, the CASA survey probes substance-abuse risk and identifies factors that increase or diminish the likelihood that teens will abuse tobacco, alcohol or illegal drugs. The annual CASA survey has consistently shown a correlation between frequent family dinners and reduced risk that a teen will smoke, drink or use illegal drugs. As a result, this year CASA sought to examine the relationship of family dinners to specific characteristics that increase or diminish the likelihood that a teen will smoke, drink or use illegal drugs. Appendixes include the methodology for CASA's 2003 survey and the CASA strategy for assessing the substance abuse risk of a teenager. (GCP)

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The Importance of Family Dinners

September 2003

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Chapter I
Introduction

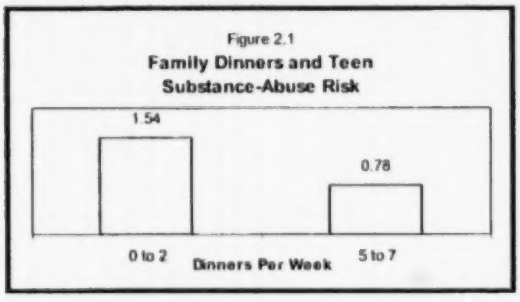
For eight years, CASA has been engaged in the unprecedented undertaking of surveying attitudes of teens and those who most influence them--parents, teachers and school principals. While other surveys seek to measure the extent of substance abuse in the population, the CASA survey--the *CASA National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VIII: Teens and Parents*--probes substance-abuse risk and identifies factors that increase or diminish the likelihood that teens will abuse tobacco, alcohol or illegal drugs. The methodology for CASA's 2003 survey is described in Appendix A.

The annual CASA survey has consistently shown a correlation between frequent family dinners and reduced risk that a teen will smoke, drink or use illegal drugs. As a result, this year we sought to examine the relationship of family dinners to specific characteristics that increase or diminish the likelihood that a teen will smoke, drink or use illegal drugs.

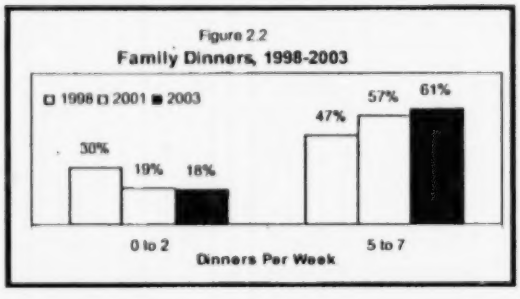
Chapter II
Family Dinners and Teen Substance-Abuse Risk

The CASA strategy for assessing the substance-abuse risk of a teenager is described in Appendix B: the average substance-abuse risk score for all teens is 1.00, the risk score for a teen who does not smoke, drink or use illegal drugs is 0.50, and the risk for a teen who admits to currently smoking or drinking, or having tried marijuana, is 1.65.

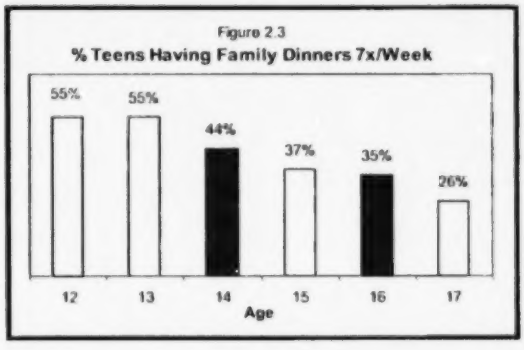
Teens who have dinner with their families two nights a week or less are at double the risk of substance abuse as teens who have frequent family dinners (1.54 vs. 0.78). (Figure 2.1).



Sixty-one percent of teens have dinner with their family at least five times a week, a substantial increase in family dining from the 1998 CASA survey, when the relationship of frequent family dinners to substance-abuse risk was first measured. (Figure 2.2).

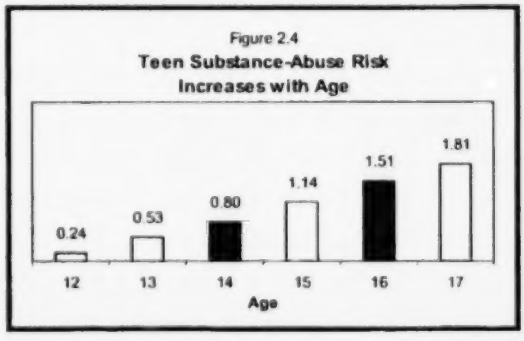


The older teens are, the less likely they are to have dinner with their families: More than twice as many 12-year olds as 17-year olds report having dinner with their families seven nights in a typical week (55 percent of 12-year olds vs. 26 percent of 17-year olds). (Figure 2.3).



There appears to be a significant drop off in family dinners as a teen moves from middle school to and through high school.

This decline in frequent family dinners from age 12 to 17 is of serious concern because, as the CASA survey shows, that period is one of sharply increasing risk of substance abuse. Among the youngest age cohort in the CASA survey (12-year olds), the average risk score is 0.24. By the time a respondent reaches age 17, the average risk score jumps to 1.81, a more than sevenfold increase. (Figure 2.4).



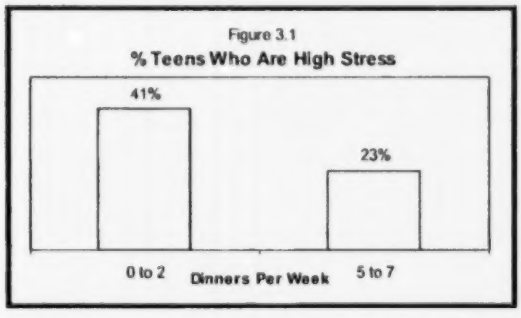
Chapter III
Family Dinners and Stress, Boredom, Academic Performance

CASA's back to school survey, released on August 19, 2003, found that high stress and frequent boredom increase the likelihood that a teen will smoke, drink, get drunk and use illegal drugs. This family dinners survey reveals that teens are less likely to be high stress or often bored if they have frequent family dinners. Our survey also found that teens who have frequent family dinners are likelier to get better grades in school.

Stress

Teens were asked to rate the amount of stress they feel they are under, using a scale of zero to 10. High stress teens (seven to 10 on the stress scale; 26 percent of teens) are twice as likely as low stress teens (zero to three on the stress scale; 29 percent of teens) to smoke, drink, get drunk and use illegal drugs.

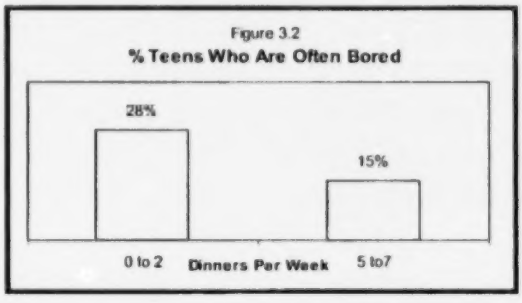
High stress among teens is more common when family dinners are less frequent. Among teens who have dinner with their families two times a week or less, 41 percent are high stress, compared with 23 percent of those who have dinner with their families five or more times a week. (Figure 3.1).



Boredom

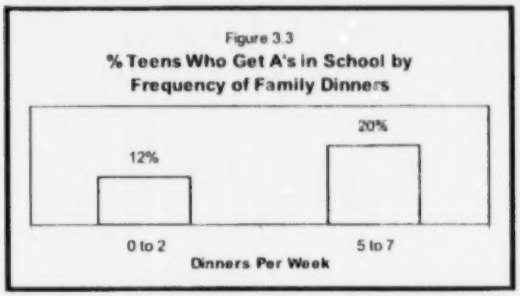
The CASA survey found that teens who are often bored are at higher risk of smoking, drinking, getting drunk and using illegal drugs: often bored teens (17 percent) are 50 percent likelier than not often bored teens (83 percent) to smoke, drink, get drunk and use illegal drugs.

Teens who eat dinner with their families two times a week or less are almost twice as likely to say they are often bored as teens who have dinner with their families five or more times in a typical week (28 percent vs. 15 percent). (Figure 3.2).

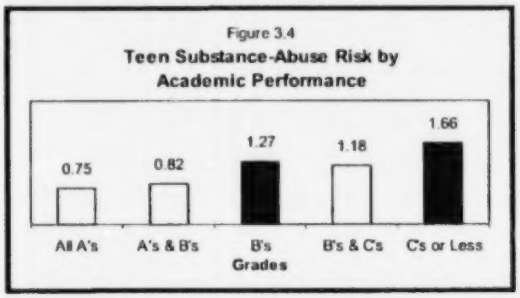


Academic Performance

Teens who have dinner with their families five or more times a week are almost twice as likely to receive A's in school compared to teens who have dinner with their families two or fewer times a week (20 percent vs. 12 percent). (Figure 3.3).



Academic performance is tied to substance-abuse risk. Teens who typically receive grades of C or lower are at twice the risk of substance abuse as those receiving A's and B's (1.66 vs. 0.75 and 0.82). (Figure 3.4).

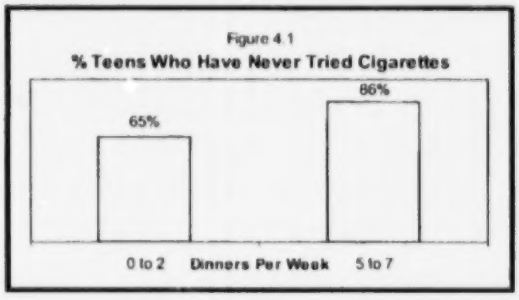


Chapter IV
Family Dinners and Smoking, Drinking, Using Illegal Drugs

Frequent family dinners are associated with lower rates of smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs.

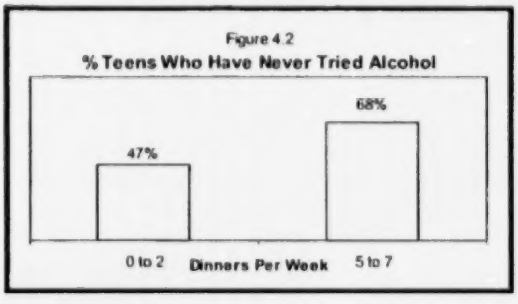
Smoking

Among teens who have dinner with their families five or more nights in a typical week, 86 percent report that they have never tried cigarettes, compared with 65 percent of those teens who have dinner with their families two nights a week or less. (Figure 4.1).



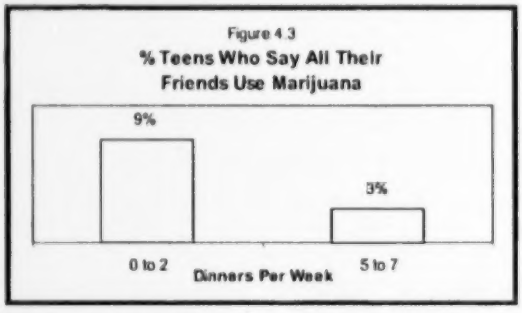
Drinking

Teens who have dinner with their families five or more nights in a typical week are almost 50 percent likelier to report that they have never tried alcohol compared to teens who have dinner with their families two nights a week or less (68 percent vs. 47 percent). (Figure 4.2).

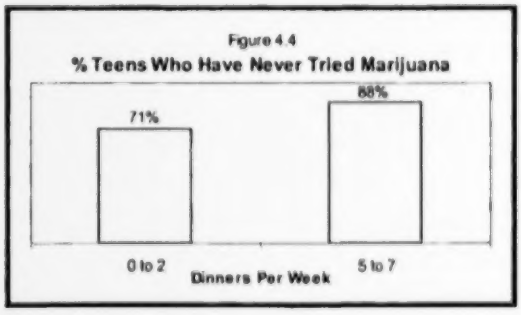


Marijuana Use

Teens who have dinner with their families twice per week or less are three times likelier to report that all their friends use marijuana, compared to teens who have dinner with their families five or more times per week (nine percent vs. three percent). (Figure 4.3) The CASA survey found that risk increases substantially among teens whose friends smoke, drink or use illegal drugs.



Teens who have dinner with their families five or more nights per week are somewhat likelier to report that they have never tried marijuana compared to teens who have dinner with their families two nights a week or less (88 percent vs. 71 percent). (Figure 4.4).



Appendix A
CASA 2003 Back to School Survey Methodology

The questionnaire for CASA's 2003 back to school survey was designed by the staffs of QEV Analytics and CASA. Questions and themes were pretested by conducting focus groups in Wayne, New Jersey, with suburban teens without a particular ethnic or racial characteristic; qualitative research in previous years has focused on specific ethnic and racial communities.

The survey was conducted by telephone, utilizing a random household selection procedure, in which a large pool of telephone numbers was assembled by a commercial survey sample vendor utilizing extensive information concerning telephone number assignments across the country. Numbers in this initial pool represented all 48 continental states in proportion to their population, and were pre-screened by computer to eliminate as many unassigned or nonresidential telephone numbers as possible so as to improve the efficiency of the telephone interviewing process.

Households were qualified for participation in the survey by determining that a teen 12- to 17-years old lived in the household. At least four call back attempts were made to each telephone number before the telephone number was rejected. All interviewing was conducted by a single telephone interviewing center; however, additional agencies were utilized to qualify households for participation in the survey. In roughly 400 cases, a household was pre-qualified for participation while the interviews were conducted in subsequent calls.

Once a household was qualified as the residence of an eligible teenager, age 12 to 17, permission for survey participation of the teen was sought from the teen's parent or guardian. After permission was obtained, if the potential teen participant was available, the teen interview was attempted. If the potential teen participant was not available at the time of the initial contact with the parent or guardian, then the parent/guardian interview was attempted, and a call back scheduled for the teen interview.

In total, 1,987 teenagers (1,044 boys and 943 girls) and 504 parents of teenagers were interviewed between April 30, 2003 and July 14, 2003. The large number of surveys was collected in order to obtain a substantial subsample of admitted marijuana users. The margin of sampling error for the teen survey is ±2 2 percent at a 95 percent confidence level (meaning, were it possible to interview all teenagers in the country between the ages of 12 and 17, the results would vary by no more than ±2.2 percent, 19 times out of 20, from what was found in this survey).

The data collection process was supervised by QEV Analytics of Washington, DC. After comparing the results of the survey with known national population characteristics, weighting was applied to bring the achieved age, gender, and ethnic distribution into line with the March 2003 Current Population Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey analysis and the writing of the report were done by Steve Wagner of QEV Analytics and Elizabeth Planet of CASA.

Complete results of CASA's 2003 survey--the *CASA National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VIII: Teens and Parents*--can be found at http://www.casacolumbia.org.

Appendix B
How CASA Calculates Teen Substance-Abuse Risk

For eight years, CASA has been conducting a major survey of public opinion on substance abuse, seeking answers to the question: "Why do some teenagers smoke, drink and use illegal drugs while others do not?"

This survey continues an analysis aimed at revealing the factors that contribute to teen substance-abuse risk. We have found that the risk of substance abuse can be attributed to identifiable characteristics of teenagers, their household, their parents and their school environment. By identifying factors that contribute to a teenager's risk of substance abuse, we seek to identify strategies to diminish that risk.

The CASA back to school survey is not intended to be an epidemiological study of substance abuse. While CASA's survey includes questions about substance use, for measurements of the actual incidence of drug and other substance usage there are other sources of data. This survey was conducted by telephone with a randomly selected sample of 1,987 teenagers (ages 12 to 17) living in the United States. Despite assurances of confidentiality, we assume that some teenage respondents will be reluctant to admit illegal activities over the telephone to someone unknown to them. Therefore, this survey --like any self-report telephone survey-- likely under-reports the extent of use of illegal drugs and the consumption of tobacco products and alcohol by teenagers and over-reports positive behaviors.

The CASA strategy for assessing the substance-abuse risk of a teenage respondent is to measure the prevalence of tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs in the teen's daily life. We use a statistical procedure called factor analysis to combine a teen's response to eight survey questions (Table B.1) to yield a "substance-abuse risk score" for each teen respondent--that is, to measure the likelihood that each respondent will use different substances.

Factor analysis also confirms the validity of combining the eight indicator variables into a single scale. This risk score then becomes our key dependent variable, the phenomenon we seek to explain by reference to the other responses and characteristics of the teen and his or her parent.

To put this risk score in context, the average risk score for all teens is 1.00, the risk score for a teen who does not smoke, drink or use illegal drugs is 0.50, and the risk for a teen who admits to currently smoking or drinking, or having tried marijuana, is 1.65.

Table B.1
The Eight CASA Indicators of Teenage Substance-Abuse Risk

1. How often have you smoked cigarettes during the past 30 days? (Questions 42/43)
2. How many of your friends drink alcoholic beverages? (Question 44)
3. How often do you get drunk? (Questions 47/50)
4. How many of your friends use marijuana? (Question 65)
5. o you know a friend or classmate who uses acid, cocaine or heroin? (Question 62)
6. How long would it take you to buy marijuana? (Question 66)
7. Have you ever tried marijuana? (Question 67)
8. How likely is it that you will try illegal drugs in the future? (Question 76)

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